Emotions and Interpersonal Relationships: Toward a Person-Centered Conceptualization of Emotions and Coping

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ABSTRACT This essay describes my theory of emotions. I make a case for studying discrete emotions in the context of four processes that represent the central features of my theoretical system: appraising, coping, flow of actions and reactions, and relational meaning. I explain why coping is a key feature of the emotion process, and I discuss issues related to the measurement of coping and the importance of understanding coping processes in the context of personality and situational demands. I make the argument that emotions are best studied as narratives, and I offer one such narrative in the form of a case study to demonstrate how emotions can best be understood in the context of an interpersonal relationship and by considering individual differences, interpersonal transactions, and relational meaning. I conclude this essay with a caution that field specialization may interfere with our understanding of emotions and other psychological phenomena, and I underscore the virtues of ipsative-normative research designs as a way to move closer to a person-centered personality psychology.

My aim in this essay is to present a theoretical approach to the emotions. I refer to my approach to stress and the emotions as *cognitive*, *motivational*, and *relational* because, as I see it, these processes

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lie at the heart of all our lives. The term *relational* means that emotions always depend on what transpires between a person and the environment, which most importantly consists of other persons. Another essential premise is that we are constantly *appraising*—that is, imputing *relational meaning* to our ongoing and changing relationships with others and the physical environment, and it is this meaning that shapes and defines our emotions.

If we regard emotions as having major significance for adaptation, then the traditional tripartite division of the mind into cognition, motivation, and emotion must be supplemented with another concept, the *coping process*. Coping is concerned with our efforts to manage adaptational demands and the emotions they generate. These add an action-based feature to the transactions we have with the outside world. Therefore, we now have a quartet of basic constructs of the mind instead of a trilogy.

An appraisal of the requirements and options for coping takes place at the very instant we recognize an emotion-relevant condition in an encounter with the world—that is, one in which we have a significant stake. In effect, coping and the appraisals that influence it mediate any emotions that are generated by the emotion process (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988a,1988b).

Coping is an integral feature of the emotion process. Yet most theories of emotion, even some that center on appraisal, do not emphasize it; some barely mention coping, though it is often implied. The omission is not strictly a matter of terminology but a product of the recency with which a programmatic psychology of coping has come into being. I have done my best to redress this omission in my theoretical efforts (Lazarus, 1999b; 2003) and in this essay.

Another purpose of this essay is to place my theory of emotion within the perspectives of two quite different yet interacting fields, personality psychology and social psychology. I want to show that the perspectives in these two fields—and probably other cognate fields, such as cultural anthropology, sociology, physiology, and medicine—are needed to comprehend fully how people live, survive, and flourish and the emotions these adaptational struggles evoke.

THE CASE FOR DISCRETE EMOTIONS AND APPRAISAL THEORY

From an evolutionary standpoint, emotions facilitate the struggles of warm-blooded mammals to survive and flourish. It must be ac-

knowledged, however, that emotions can also impair adaptation. Evolution is not perfect with respect to its adaptational consequences. It is only in the last few decades that the emotions have come into their own in psychological thought. This is partly the result of growing enthusiasm for a discrete approach to the emotions, in contrast with dimensional analysis, which was previously favored in academe. Each discrete emotion has both an intensity dimension and a number of distinctive qualitative features, the nature of which depend on the encounter that provoked the emotion and the personalities and histories of the participants.

The trouble with the dimensional approach is that it reduces the qualitative content to a few quantitative dimensions—for example, pleasant-unpleasant, relaxed-tense, and calm-excited, to draw on Wundt's (1905) classic analysis. The method currently employed by the dimensional approach is factor analysis, which seeks to identify the fewest possible dimensions, usually two or three, that are capable of encompassing as much of the emotion response variance as possible, depending on the measure chosen.

Although dimensional analysis is useful for certain purposes, this reduction of the qualitative aspects of emotions to a very small number of dimensions greatly oversimplifies their psychosocial dynamics. This penchant for reduction has long plagued psychology and stems from imitating the hard sciences, which, in my opinion, provide a poor model for psychological research and theory.

For thousands of years, emotions have been thought to consist of a number of discrete kinds, such as anger, fear, anxiety, guilt, shame, joy, love, and so forth—the exact number depending on what are considered to be the most useful categories. An emphasis on discrete emotions is better attuned to complexity and variability. Each discrete emotion has distinctive antecedents, specific effects on other people (and oneself), and unique mediating processes.

Although the language of discrete emotions contains considerable ambiguity and epitomizes what could be called a commonsense view of emotion, *appraisal theory* as a way of conceptualizing the emotion process is eminently capable of achieving a highly sophisticated analysis, as I hope to demonstrate. The verb form, *appraising*, in contrast with the noun *appraisal*, has the advantage of emphasizing an action or process rather than a product. The process of appraising is an attempt to deal with the inevitable and ubiquitous individual differences in the ways we react emotionally. It is an evaluation of

the personal significance of our relationships with others and the options for coping. This can be a complex task, though it often happens without reason in the manner of an instinct. Appraising must take into account many variables that include the social and physical environment and diverse personal interests.

Appraising makes it possible to construct *relational meanings*, which refer to the significance for the individual of what is happening in the person-environment relationship, the most important aspect of which is interpersonal. It is this kind of meaning that determines which emotions are experienced and/or displayed in any encounter with others (Lazarus, 1999a; 2001). This approach to the emotions has resulted in much recent theory and research on how the appraisal process shapes the discrete emotions that are generated (Scherer, Schore, & Johnstone, 2001).

A systematic account of emotion requires an examination of its basic structures and processes. Such an account must include statements about what provoked the emotion and how social relationships and personality factors contributed to the relational meaning. To make this account, we must have more than highly abstract statements. We need concrete details about a particular emotion to exemplify the general structures or processes. Any emotion can be employed for this purpose. I have chosen *gratitude*. Although this emotion seems marginal in intensity compared, say, to anger and fear, it is an emotion that very clearly illustrates how the give-and-take of an ongoing relationship between two persons brings about the emotion and how all this is coped with. The give-and-take involved in gratitude is centered on gift giving and receiving. In other emotions the social context is different.

The emotion that is experienced as a result of being the giver of a gift (the donor) could be joy at the opportunity to give what is appreciated, contempt for the recipient, or some other emotion, depending on the way that the donor appraises what is taking place. The recipient might experience gratitude or a number of other emotions—such as anger, anxiety, guilt, or shame—depending on that person's appraisals and coping processes.

It is not only the complex interpersonal dynamics of gift giving and receiving that prompted me to choose gratitude as my example. Despite widespread disregard of this emotion among emotion theorists, there are grounds for considering it important in our daily lives (Lazarus & Lazarus, 1994). Emmons and Shelton (2002) have

presented a review of some of the research and theory related to gratitude. They note that Maslow (1970) was interested in gratitude and spoke of it as "the capacity to appreciate the basic goods of life with awe, pleasure, wonder, and even ecstasy" (p. 136). He also considered it essential for positive mental health.

Another major source of speculation about gratitude comes from Melanie Klein (1975), who asserted that gratitude depends on the capacity to love and is related to generosity. It is, in effect, a complex emotion from an intrapsychic standpoint because to feel grateful, an individual must acknowledge that another person has something of value to give. For some, this acknowledgment can create envy instead of gratitude. Klein's idea that envy undermines gratitude, and presumably love, carries an aura of truth. In sum, to experience gratitude requires that a person have a benign view of others, and maybe of life itself.

With its psychological connection to envy and love, and the importance of giving and receiving throughout life, gratitude may be a far more important emotion than most psychologists have assumed. One can also see that giving and receiving is no simple input-output (stimulus-response) phenomenon, but a complex set of social events and mediating psychological processes.

The close analysis of gift giving and receiving, incidentally, has something in common with the celebrated work of Erving Goffman in his book *Relations in Public* (1979), in which he offers rich descriptions of the moment-to-moment transactions between two people in social contexts such as gambling. Later in the essay I present an actual case of gratitude, and I present several variants in the emotional response to gift giving and receiving.

THE GENERAL STRUCTURE AND PROCESS OF AN EMOTION

All emotions have at least two psychological structures: a *figure* and a *background.* Figure-ground analysis was introduced by European Gestalt psychologists as a method of examining perceptual phenomena as component parts or substructures that comprise a phenomenological whole. The basic outlook is that the separate component parts do not adequately describe any phenomenon of interest because the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. A structure refers to a psychological arrangement that is relatively stable over time and circumstance.

Emotions also depend on processes, which I refer to as the flow of actions and reactions—that is, the give and take of interpersonal exchanges among the participants in an encounter from which one or more emotions are generated. This flow provides continuous feedback to both participants about the potential implications of what is taking place between them. A process always refers to something that is changing.

An emotional encounter is not a single action or reaction, as in a still photo or a static stimulus-response unit, but a continuous flow of actions and reactions among the persons who participate in it. This flow can generate new emotions or lead to changes in earlier ones. It is usually an action of some sort that precipitates an emotion sequence. We might call the action the provocation of the emotion. Even the absence of an action when it is expected or desired can be a provocation, as when we want another person to do something, such as give a gift or an opinion, express appreciation (gratitude) for a gift, or pay a compliment. However, in this case, the other person waits for the action in vain, which is what provokes an emotion, such as disappointment, anger, anxiety, or guilt.

Individual differences in the way people react to the same or similar events make it difficult to understand why a person reacts with an emotion unless we know the events that preceded the provocation and what the reacting person is like. In other words, to make sense of why the figural action or inaction was emotionally provocative, we need to know the *background*, which includes the personality characteristics of the participants in the encounter and the history of the relationship.

The personality characteristics that are likely to be important consist mainly of the participants' goals, goal hierarchies, beliefs about self and world (including what they have learned to expect from each other), and personal resources. Resources include intelligence, social and work skills, health and energy, education, wealth, supportive family and friends, and physical and social attractiveness. The history of the relationship, which is also part of the background, consists of what has happened in the past between the participants in the current emotional encounter and the expectations these past experiences evoke.

Together, background variables and the flow of actions and reactions influence whether the action initiating the encounter—that is, the figure—becomes a provocation. They do so by shaping how each

person appraises the significance of the encounter for her or his personal well-being. This significance is the most important aspect of relational meaning, on which a particular emotion is predicated.

Each discrete emotion has a distinctive relational meaning—that is, a particular harm, threat, challenge, or benefit—and is the product of the process of appraising. The emotions experienced by the individuals involved in an encounter may be the same, similar, or different. Their individual histories and personalities differ and, in all likelihood, so do the distinctive ways in which they have appraised what is happening. I also refer to this relational meaning as a *core relational theme*. To a substantial degree, relational meaning causes and, in part, constitutes the subjective affect or qualitative feel of the emotional reaction (see Shweder, 1993). Included also in the subjective affect is an *action tendency* or *impulse* for each emotion, for example, attack in anger or avoidance and escape in fear.

In sum, four processes—*appraising*, *coping*, the *flow of actions and reactions*, and *relational meaning*—constitute the central features of my theoretical system. Table 1 depicts the core relational themes of 15 emotions, including gratitude. I present them without elaboration or discussion (for details see Lazarus, 1991, 1999b; Lazarus & Lazarus, 1994).

THE IMPORTANCE OF EMOTIONS IN OUR LIVES

Five features of emotions put them at the center of our lives. First, more than any other psychological process, acute emotions and other affective states, such as moods, reveal what is personally important to us and serve as a barometer of how well or poorly we are doing in advancing our most cherished values, goals, and beliefs. When things go wrong, we experience anxiety, anger, guilt, shame, envy, or jealousy, each of which reflects a different harm or threat. When things go right, we experience joy, pride, or love, each of which reflects a different personal benefit or, in some instances, a sense of challenge that could leave us exhilarated.

Second, emotions are among the most prominent features of our ongoing relationships with family members, lovers, friends, coworkers, competitors, and even some short-term social contacts. They have always been a main theme of literature, drama, and cinema, in

Table 1
The Core Relational Themes of Fifteen Emotions

Emotion	Core Relational Theme
Anger	A demeaning offense against me and mine
Anxiety	Facing an uncertain, existential threat
Fright	Confronting an immediate, concrete, and overwhelming physical danger
Guilt	Having transgressed a moral imperative
Shame	Having failed to live up to an ego-ideal
Sadness	Having experienced an irrevocable loss
Envy	Wanting what someone else has and feeling deprived in its absence
Jealousy	Resenting a third party for loss or threat to one's favor or love
Happiness	Making reasonable progress toward the attainment of a goal
Pride	Enhancement of one's ego-identity by taking credit for a valued achievement, one's own or that of a person or group with which one identifies
Relief	A distressing goal-incongruent condition that has changed for the better or gone away
Hope	Fearing the worst but yearning for better and believing the wished-for improvement is possible
Love	Desiring or participating in affection, usually, but not necessarily, reciprocated
Gratitude	Appreciation for an altruistic gift
Compassion	Being moved to offer help by another's suffering

the form of stories about people struggling to adapt to the demands and opportunities of living.

Third, emotions facilitate or impair interpersonal relationships, especially intimate ones. Anger can trump affection and lead to retaliation. Guilt and anxiety can undermine the resolve to accomplish something or to assert oneself. Shame can lead to anger or to the concealment of the truth. There is no more useful coping skill than knowing how to deal with interpersonal relationships, especially when these relationships are troubled.

Fourth, even if we think we understand what has generated an emotion in others or ourselves, the process involved can be obscure, especially with respect to the emotion's deepest and most inaccessible personal sources. Although some of us are more open than others,

we are commonly reluctant to expose to others our inner selves lest the truth prove socially harmful.

As Japanese writers have understood, each of us has an inner and an outer self (Doi, 1985). Thus, emotions—and the beliefs and desires that fuel them—cannot be observed directly even though there may be overt evidence that a person is disturbed. To the extent that the inner qualities of an emotion (e.g., feelings, action tendencies, and subjective affects) are not directly visible, they are difficult to infer accurately. This is one reason why the study of the emotion process as a science remains a significant challenge.

The fifth critical feature of emotions is that they are often difficult to control, especially when they are intense. Emotion regulation is one of the functions of coping. For example, we may know the dangers of expressing anger toward someone we care about, but when provoked, the immediate impulse to retaliate for the offense may be too strong to be restrained, and so we attack. This can result in a mutual escalation of anger until it becomes rage, which can lead to immediate or long-term psychological or physical harm to one or both participants.

REASON AND EMOTION: A TOUGH SELL

In much of the Western world, emotions tend to be viewed as irrational. They are often viewed as the opposite of reason. We blame them inappropriately for many of our troubles, even when they are not the cause. We need to think more carefully about blaming emotions for our follies. It is important to recognize that emotions reflect the way we believe things are going for or against us. They are, in effect, logical and depend on reason or thought, even though the reasoning may be faulty or based on unrealistic premises.

Consider two examples of the erroneous view that reason and emotion are necessarily opposed. Writing about the public attitude toward the death penalty, the distinguished American columnist, Anthony Lewis (*New York Times*, January 2, 1998, p. A15) states, ''People want the death penalty, we are convinced, for emotional rather than rational reasons.'' I would have preferred that he had said ''for reasons that are not thoughtful and wise.'' The point is that it is no more irrational to desire the death penalty, as many people do, than to reject that penalty, as many others do. Therefore, al-

though strong emotions are connected with this humanitarian and political issue, they cannot be said to be the basis of one or the other position on the death penalty question.

Another example is found in *Emotional Intelligence* (1995), in which Daniel Goleman, previously the science writer for the *New York Times*, writes (p. 8), "In a very real sense we have two minds, one that thinks and one that feels." And on page 20, he states, "Our emotions have a mind of their own, one which [sic] can hold views quite independently of our rational mind." Although I am confident that this was written to appeal to the uninformed, I believe that these assertions are misleading.

It should be acknowledged that emotions, especially intense ones, do indeed sometimes interfere with a reasoned examination of an issue of personal importance or a cognitive task that demands attention and concentration. As Mandler (1984) pointed out, when we experience an emotion, an important demand has to some extent preempted our attention. The new demand interrupts what we have been doing and interferes with the attention and concentration we need to pursue it. Much of threat-based anxiety research in the 1950s and 1960s demonstrated such interference with judgment and task performance (Child & Waterhouse, 1952; Lazarus, 1966).

It is mostly the poor quality of our thought, knowledge, and beliefs and the lack of wisdom in the goals to which we commit ourselves that are the primary causes of human folly. Even when we suspect direct emotional interference, we will usually be unable to predict the direction of the decision. When we fear other people or feel anger toward them, for example, it is because we believe they wish to harm us. Even if this threat appraisal is unsound, as long as we believe we are in danger from them, fear and anger are perfectly sensible reactions. The appraisal follows from an incorrect premise, one that often remains unrecognized. Blaming our foolishness on emotion and calling it irrational is attributing the problem to the wrong cause (Lazarus, 1995).

It is difficult to convince people in the West about the essential role of reason or rationality in emotion. The concept of inevitable conflict between emotion and reason originated in ancient Greece over 2,000 years ago and is deeply ingrained in our thinking. Even among psychologists there has been considerable debate about the epistemology being espoused here concerning the relationships

among cognition, motivation, and emotion, especially the thesis that emotions are rational (Dalgleish & Power, 1999; Lazarus, 1998a). With respect to the rationality of the emotions, consider the point that there could be no science of emotion if emotions were not rule based—that is, if they did not follow an implacable logic. An important scientific task is to understand the logic that is involved in the generation and regulation of emotions.

The scientific and practical significance of a sound cognitive, motivational, and relational theory of emotion rests on two fundamental principles. First, if we begin our analysis of an adaptational encounter with an emotion that is displayed or being experienced by a particular person under a given set of life conditions, we should be able to make a good deductive guess about what that person must be desiring and thinking. Second, if we instead begin our analysis with what a particular person desires and thinks, we should be able to make a good deductive guess about which emotion this person is likely to display or experience under given conditions.

Notice the lovely symmetry of these two principles, which unite particular emotions with particular kinds of reason. The deductions go both ways—that is, forward from reason to the emotion and backward from the emotion to reason. If the theory is sound, then something like what I have just said should follow. This gives us tremendous power to understand the emotion process and to influence emotions socially and clinically.

COPING AND EMOTION

I have already stated that coping is an integral feature of the emotion process. I take up four issues in this section. The first is why coping is important. The second has to do with the measurement of coping. The third is about the inappropriateness of keeping coping modes separate from each other—for example, problem-focused and emotion-focused coping. The fourth examines the necessity of regarding coping in the context of personality and the situation being faced, regardless of whether coping is viewed as a process, trait, or style. The philosophical basis for all these issues is my emphasis on part-whole relationships and my conviction that coping should never be divorced from the persons who are engaged in it and the environmental context in which it takes place.

Why Coping Is Important

When I started doing research on stress around 1950, only the military seemed interested. They were concerned mainly about two issues: first, how to select for combat men who would be resistant to stress, and second, how these men should be trained to become as resilient as possible. Exploration of these questions rapidly forced me to confront individual differences, which, in turn, led to a concern with personality characteristics, such as motivation, beliefs about self and world, and coping choices and preferences. It became necessary to reformulate my initially primitive ideas about what stress is all about and to do additional theorizing and research. This reexamination of the concept of stress ultimately led to an integrative book on stress and coping (Lazarus, 1966).

It was not until the 1970s that the importance of coping became substantially manifest and research began to burgeon (e.g., Coelho, Hamburg, & Adams, 1974). It became clear that it is not stress alone that counts in a person's overall well-being but how with the individual copes with this stress. Stress is a natural and expectable feature of living, but it also makes the coping process necessary. If coping is ineffective, stress is apt to be substantial and may have damaging consequences for health, morale, and social functioning. If coping is effective, stress is likely to remain under control.

A complication to this simple formula, however, is that people who cope effectively tend to "expand the envelope" by venturing beyond where they have gone before to reach the limits of what is possible. Although this adds to their stress, the challenge of doing so makes life more gratifying. Stress is, in effect, not necessarily a negative force. It can mobilize us to achieve more than we believed could be accomplished, and it can even lead to a greater appreciation of life. From crisis, too, can come a reorganization of our lives in ways that leave us more productive, engaged, and satisfied than before the crisis.

The Measurement of Coping

My holistic outlook and clinical leanings influence how I view the measurement of coping. Reductive analysis, rather than rich description, has been the dominant perspective of science for a long time. This makes it ultimately necessary to attempt to resynthesize

the parts into the phenomenological whole that originally caught our interest, a necessary step that is seldom taken (see Dewey, 1896; Dewey & Bentley, 1989). The contrast between analysis and synthesis turns out to be quite relevant in coping measurement.

I had a major role in the development of a widely used measurement procedure, the *Ways of Coping Questionnaire* (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988). As later debates have made clear (see Lazarus, 2000), a questionnaire should be considered only as a first step in the exploration of the coping process, a step that can do some good but perhaps even more harm. On the positive side, questionnaire development led to factor analytic studies of different ways of coping, which were useful for an early conceptualization of coping, and then proceeded to the identification of a number of basic types of coping that were subsumed under two main functions: problem-focused and emotion-focused coping.

Even the most sophisticated coping questionnaires, however, are too narrowly focused and superficial to dominate research on coping for long. They fail to assess what needs to be known about the person and the situational context. Our measurement procedure in developing the *Ways of Coping Questionnaire* mainly addressed individuals' coping-related thoughts and actions, which are the most evident features of coping. This emphasis on parts of the whole neglects goals, situational intentions, beliefs about self and world, personal history, inaccessible conflicts, and emotional traits. Above all, coping questionnaires exclude the relational meanings that a person constructs about an emotional encounter, which is the key influence on coping and its outcomes.

Overly simplistic approaches to coping assessment, in which thoughts and acts are dissociated from the person who is doing the coping, limit the coping researcher to only a small part of the process, as if we believe that this part constitutes the whole. If we truly want to make a serious attempt to understand coping, we must not fall back on what is quick and easy, which many researchers do, but rather, expand our focus.

Another way to put this is that the coping process should not be divorced from the person who is doing the coping and his or her situational context. Descriptions of the person should not be eschewed in favor of the reductive search for causal variables. Knowing adequately those who cope—that is, describing them as persons in a particular environment—is as important as knowing a few of the

many low-power antecedent correlates of how they cope. In a seminal and influential article, Carlson (1971) complained that in the effort to generalize about people, personality psychologists have lost sight of the individual person. This seems to be as true—if not more so—today as ever.

Even the theory of coping has been tainted by this problem of treating a part of the process as if it were the whole. Folkman and I (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) defined coping as "constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person" (p. 141). This is fine as a process definition. It emphasizes only part of the coping process, however, and maybe not the most important part—that is, coping thoughts and acts that are presented without reference to the personal meaning of what is going on. It is this meaning that gives vitality to our lives. Meaning incorporates our goals, cherished beliefs, and situational intentions.

This is not to say that thoughts and actions are unimportant in the coping process. They are necessary for the adequate assessment of coping. If, however, we think of such thoughts and actions as the individual elements of the coping process—that is, the trees, so to speak—they must be placed within the forest in which they live, which refers to a larger picture, a whole that is needed to understand fully what the individual trees are all about.

A number of studies have claimed that problem-focused coping is superior to emotion-focused coping in producing positive adaptational outcomes, whereas, in other studies, the opposite has been reported. Most of these studies have ignored the situational and life context of the participants and their personal appraisals of what could realistically be done to cope. They did not determine whether the source of stress was judged to be amenable or refractory to change (for more details, see Lazarus, 1999b).

A more important point is that it would be desirable to abandon the idea of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping as two independent types of coping, one addressing problems and the other regulating the emotions. This is why I refer to them as coping functions. To treat the two coping functions as separate and competing is a serious epistemological mistake because, in most stress situations, they actually complement each other. They ordinarily combine component parts of the total coping process. In nature, part processes

operate together as a coherent unit and to separate them and set them up as competitive is to distort the way coping actually works.

Coping as Process, Trait, and Style

Coping can be viewed as a process that is subject to personal and social forces, a personality trait, or a style. Only by means of longitudinal or ipsative-normative research designs can a researcher make the observations necessary to show change in coping that constitutes a process, or that demonstrates the stability that constitutes a trait or style. When coping strategies change over time and circumstance, they must be thought of as a process (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985). When such strategies are relatively stable, they must be seen as traits or styles. Stability and change are thus two sides of the same coin.

Traits and styles are essentially the same in their basic meaning, which is that they show stability over time and circumstance. Styles, however, refer to two traits that are contrasted with each other along a continuum, either a single dimension of high or low or a dichotomy between two extremes of a distribution. Avoidance versus vigilance offers a good example of a dichotomous contrast, each stable over time and circumstance. To be vigilant is the opposite of trying to avoid threats. The two traits are negatively correlated. If you are vigilant, you seek out threat; if avoidant, you stay away from it.

In the remainder of this section, I borrow substantially from what I wrote in Lazarus (1998b) about the history of the cognitive trait or style movement and its connection with ego defense. (Although that article was published in English, it appeared in a German journal, so I doubt that many American psychologists have read it.)

There are three different ways of thinking about how coping traits and styles can be identified. The first is entirely empirical and describes patterns that are habitual, as in coping thoughts and actions that are correlated over time and across situations in the same individuals. This is an atheoretical approach in the sense that what is correlated over time and circumstance defines a way of coping that is stable (i.e., a trait or style rather than a state or process).

The second approach is to identify, on the basis of theory or speculation, coping traits that should be stable and then do the research to evaluate their stability. This deductive approach is superior to an atheoretical one because it is rationally derived and is apt to be linked to other traits or styles. However, like the empirical approach,

it leads mostly to low or, at best, moderate intra-individual correlations, which suggest some, but not much, stability.

A third and, in my view, the most sophisticated and fruitful approach to coping traits and styles is described by Wright and Mischel (1987). Low stability in intra-individual correlations produced by the first and second approaches led these authors to propose an approach to traits that is conditional on environmental circumstances. In other words, the activation of traits depends on environmental circumstances that are made functionally equivalent by the disposition or trait. In effect, the trait generates the expected reaction only in circumstances that are relevant to the trait. The classic research of McClelland, Atkinson, Clark, and Lowell (1953) on the achievement motive is a clear example. As defined by the authors and supported by evidence, the achievement motive does not activate achievement striving under any or all conditions, but only under conditions that favor it—for example, a competitive activation or one that emphasizes a standard of excellence for performance.

Interest in coping styles emerged from Allport and Vernon's (1933) research on expressive movements. George Klein redirected this work from expressive movement styles to the cognitive styles of leveling and sharpening (Gardner, Holzman, Klein, Linton, & Spence, 1959; see also Holzman & Gardner, 1959). Leveling has to do with seeing commonalities in a perceptual array, whereas sharpening emphasizes seeing differences, or as Klein seemed to prefer, different ways of thinking that lead developmentally to different ways of coping. Klein, a Freudian ego–psychologist in the David Rapaport tradition, was particularly interested in the connection between ego-defense and cognitive styles. Another research group consisting of Witkin, Lewis, Machover, Meissner, and Wapner (1954) centered its attention on a different perceptual dichotomy, which was referred to as *field dependent* versus *body dependent*. Field dependent meant using external visual cues about one's body position in an experimental chair that could be tilted in all sorts of ways. Body dependent meant using bodily cues to be oriented with respect to position. Looked upon more broadly, this meant something much grander than a minor perceptual preference—namely, whether a person relied on external cues or internal cues in relating to the world. These ideas from expressive movements to cognitive styles were personality-trait centered rather than interactive with the environment.

Because of the theoretical link between cognitive styles and ego defense and my Freudian predilections during the 1950s, I became interested in this kind of research and theory while I was just starting out at Johns Hopkins University. Among the issues I tackled was the stability of defensive styles. In Lazarus and Longo (1953), for example, we showed that if people remembered tasks on which they had failed better than tasks on which they had succeeded, they would remember nonsense syllables that had been associated with painful electric shock better than nonsense syllables that had not been associated with shock. The common process operating here was selective memory for stressful, neutral, or positive events. Some subjects consistently remembered threatening stimuli better, displaying, in effect, vigilance. Others consistently remembered nonthreatening conditions better, thereby demonstrating avoidance. The correlations indicating intra-individual consistency were, as is usual for traits, only modest. A dizzying array of terms for these defensive styles soon emerged, including vigilance versus avoidance, sensitization versus repression, and approach versus avoidance. Nowadays, vigilance and avoidance seem to have survived best, perhaps because these terms are simple and descriptive of the actual behavior being contrasted, or maybe because they contain none of the theoretical baggage of the Freudian movement and the ego psychology evolved from it.

One of my favorite studies in which I played a role was that of Lazarus, Eriksen, and Fonda (1951). We wanted to connect coping styles with neurotic diagnostic categories. From a Freudian psychosexual developmental standpoint, patients diagnosed in those days as conversion hysterics should favor repressive defenses that avoid threatening ideas. Patients diagnosed as obsessive–compulsive, however, should be vigilant against threat.

The study was performed in a Veteran's Administration clinic in Baltimore. We made a tape-recording of spoken sentences, some of which were emotionally neutral and others threatening—that is, they were sexual or aggressive in content. The sentences were masked by a white noise that was deliberately pegged at an intensity level that made it difficult for patients to recognize more than 50% of the spoken material.

We found that patients diagnosed as conversion hysterics perceived the content of emotionally threatening sentences more poorly than the neutral sentences. As predicted, they tended to avoid the

threat content. However, patients diagnosed as obsessive-compulsives did the opposite—as predicted, they perceived the threat content better than the neutral, demonstrating vigilance. Whether the sentence expressed sexual or aggressive content made no difference. This type of finding clearly supported an association between type of neurosis and coping style.

Research of this kind, which was designed for laboratory testing of psychodynamic concepts, was all the rage in the 1950s. Although this research supported the Freudian analysis, the practical clinical problem has always been that the weak, though statistically significant, correlation could not dependably predict the coping style of an individual patient. In most research, individual differences are almost always more impressive than group differences. We had, indeed, found a coping correlate of clinical syndromes, but it was too low in power to be practical on an individual or person-by-person basis. I would say that this is roughly the current status of most causal research in psychology.

Research on avoidant versus vigilant coping styles seems to have had a long life. For example, using its own scale, Krohne's research group in Germany has explored the theoretical, technical, and substantive issues of this coping style dichotomy, including its personality correlates and capacity to predict health and well-being (e.g., Krohne, 1996). Hock, Krohne and Kaiser (1996) and Sternberg and Grigorenko (1997) provide sweeping reviews of the cognitive style literature.

Coping style is almost always measured by questionnaire. Yet trait and process measures of avoidance versus vigilance are not even significantly correlated, raising serious questions about what is being measured. An old but careful study by Cohen and Lazarus (1973) compared a coping trait measure with an interview-based process approach. We contrasted trait and process measures of avoidance and vigilance in the hospital the night before minor surgery, when patients should be maximally threatened. The main process measure was an intensive interview of what the patients knew, wanted to know, and preferred not to know about their illness and the nature of the surgery they were about to undergo the next morning. Those who wanted to know were classified as vigilant; those who did not want to know were classified as avoiders.

We found no relationship between the coping process measured by the interview and what was said to be the same coping style as

measured by a questionnaire. The trait measure did not predict any of the outcomes of surgery, such as minor complications or the length of hospital stay, whereas the process measure did. Krohne, Slangen, and Kleeman (1996) confirmed the Cohen and Lazarus findings without evidently being aware of our earlier study (see also Kohlmann [1993], who used a dichotic listening task under stress and obtained similar results).

Allow me to go a bit further on this topic by pointing out the most important limitations of coping style dichotomies of the sort epitomized by avoidance versus vigilance. It is a serious mistake to force the rich and variable coping process into a single dimension or dichotomy. Doing so severely limits the variety and shifting patterns of coping that people naturally employ in dealing with harms, threats, and challenges in real life—and even in the laboratory if subjects are permitted to cope as they choose. Coping, then, is reduced to a simple overly broad contrast between style A and style B, as if most people are that rigid or limited in how they cope. If we are dealing with a dimension, the same limitation applies because the middle portion of the normal distribution includes the overwhelming majority of the individuals. Statistically insignificant variations cannot be predicted nor can they predict possible outcomes of coping. Only the reactions of a minority of the subjects—namely, those who inhabit the extreme opposite ends of the distribution—carry any capacity to predict.

A second serious limitation of coping style dichotomies is that so-called styles and traits are seldom viewed interactively with the environmental setting. Some individuals may have strong and consistent preferences for different ways of coping that justify the designation of a coping style. However, the theoretical foundations of what is currently studied seem to me to be too limited and do not allow us to say much about the way these individuals actually cope. Linked to this limitation is the failure to consider the personalities of the individuals who are engaged in coping. If someone really wants to study coping styles, it might help to examine these styles interactively with the situational context and consider central personality traits, such as goals, goal hierarchies, beliefs about self and world, and personal resources.

I still like the Lazarus, Eriksen, and Fonda (1951) comparative study of hysterics and obsessive-compulsives, and other comparable experiments, for sentimental reasons. Like so many others of its

genre, it was clever and effective for its day. In those days, I had not yet become weary of what now has become the same tired old thing. I was young and still excited that deducing a group effect from theory and testing it in the laboratory would advance our understanding. Doing this makes no sense to me anymore as a way of advancing our discipline.

A PREAMBLE TO MY FILM RESEARCH

I have come to believe (Lazarus, 1999) that emotions are best regarded and studied as dramatic stories or narratives. I was influenced to adopt this stance by the writings of quite a few distinguished enthusiasts of the narrative approach, among whom were Bruner (1990), Cohler (1982), Coles (1989), Gergen and Gergen (1986), Josselson and Lieblich (1993), McAdams (1996, 1997), Polkinghorne (1998), Sarbin (1986), Schafer (1981), and Spence (1982).

Films about people and their emotions captivate most of us. We empathize with the emotional experiences that are being portrayed in these dramas. The plots bring to mind our struggles—for example, disappointments, failures, and triumphs of the past and present and crucial events in the future that can be anticipated and for which it would be advantageous to be prepared. Aside from the artistry of actors and writers, we become emotionally engaged in these dramas because we imagine ourselves in similar circumstances. When stories reveal a universal human truth, we experience the emotions that are part of that truth.

We identify with the characters in the dramatic plot because they are like us in many ways and we share their experiences. Sometimes we identify with everyone in the drama, though perhaps not to the same degree and, in the case of some of the characters, hardly at all. Our individual personality characteristics—goals, beliefs, vulnerabilities, unresolved conflicts, and coping styles, as well as our personal history—influence this identification process.

The emotions we experience in the theater, movies, or when we read a book are usually attenuated compared with the real thing. Because we know we are reasonably safe in a theater or at home reading, these vicarious emotions are likely to be less intense than they would be in actual life. We understand that the events being portrayed are simulations of reality and the actors are merely playing

parts. Yet, if the story is written and performed well, it has the power to move us.

Had the events portrayed been actual experiences rather than stories about others, we might have been forced to turn away or leave the theater. They might be too real, and we might lose our self-control and weep or laugh uncontrollably. If a drama fails to move an audience, it would be unsuccessful, theatrically speaking. Thus, there must be some balance in how we react to it. The balance is probably controlled to some degree by the characteristic ways we cope with our emotions, in part by the ability to turn away from what distresses us or to distance ourselves emotionally from events that lead to distress.

Audible evidence of the emotional reactions in a theater audience attests to the sharing of emotions. Emotional contagion gives us the impression we are not alone in the emotions that are aroused in us. We hear the audience laugh, grow very still as people struggle to control their tears, appear restless when troubled or bored, show relief with a collective sigh, exhibit surprise or shock with an audible gasp or a rapid intake of breath, and applaud to show appreciation.

Looking away is a powerful method of coping, though probably not as durable as reappraising the significance of the event. Psychologists refer to looking away as avoidance. Sometimes it fails to work well because we have already seen too much or can imagine what is happening even without seeing it. Horowitz (1976) has written about the stages of crisis management in which the traumatized person oscillates between denial/avoidance and intrusive thoughts and images.

I remember an occasion as a boy when I was on a streetcar with my mother. A youth was riding a bicycle and was struck by an automobile and killed. It happened only a short distance from the streetcar, and, in an effort to protect me, my mother urged me not to look at what was happening. Actually, the worst sights could not be seen, yet I remember much of this event overall as me watching from the back of the streetcar despite my mother's admonition. I don't remember the gory details, but what I didn't see, I imagined.

A 1970 movie titled *I Never Sang for My Father* usually brings tears to my eyes. It touches on experiences from my past that have a strong emotional significance. Because of its focus on the family and

the poignancy of the events it depicts, this movie probably has similar effects on many older people and perhaps their children, too. Arthur Miller's great American drama *Death of a Salesman* does that to me in even more complicated and subtle ways.

Readers of this essay have probably had their own experience with one or another movie, play, or book that moved them greatly. Such experiences may provide insight into our own personal sources of emotional vulnerability, as strong emotional responses often result from fiction that comes close to some reality in one's life. My own film research, conducted during the 1960s, took advantage of the way a scene depicted in a movie can evoke powerful emotions.

MY FILM RESEARCH

Some older readers might remember that my colleagues and I used motion picture films to study stress and emotion in the laboratory (Lazarus, 1966). We assessed emotional reactions to these films by means of self-reports and psychophysiological measures, such as skin conductance and heart rate. Instead of deceiving subjects in order to create stress experimentally in the laboratory, we were capitalizing on the natural tendency of people to identify with others who are exposed to stress. We could also connect the reactions to the place in the film where they occurred because both film and the psychophysiological measurements ran simultaneously.

All of the movies we used depicted physical harm. For example, we included a silent film of an esoteric coming-of-age ritual in a primitive people (an Australian tribe called the Arunta), which presents a series of subincision operations that were performed with a stone knife on the penis and scrotum. We also used movies about woodshop accidents, sinus surgery, and other physically threatening events that for many of our subjects could be extremely disturbing to watch.

In subsequent years, I tried but was unable to obtain movies of dramas that dealt with highly emotional interpersonal and intrapsychic struggles. Only one film producer, Alfred Hitchcock, agreed to lend me his films. However, even he could not provide enough of what was needed to do programmatic research on a broad range of psychosocial sources of stress. I then tried collaborating with a Berkeley professor of dramatic arts. We put together an application for

a research grant from the National Institute of Mental Health in which we proposed making our own movies using available literary scripts and student actors at the university. Films of the kind I had in mind would have made it possible to compare universals and individual variations in the emotion process. We would have also been able to quantify emotional patterns and examine defensive forms of coping by examining contradictions among self-report, behavioral reactions, and physiological changes. Our proposal, however, was summarily rejected.

Soundtracks That Change the Stressful to Benign

After the rejection of this proposal, I turned to a programmatic plan to alter the appraisals of stressful film contents. Perhaps some readers might remember the studies my colleagues at Berkeley and I published in the 1960s about our efforts to change how student participants appraised film events. We did this by adding soundtracks to a film or, alternatively, an orienting statement that was played before the film was shown.

The main soundtracks were based on the theory of ego defense. The defenses employed were denial and intellectualization, the latter of which I now refer to as emotional distancing. Other statements were designed to increase the stress by emphasizing the distressing features of the film events (for reviews of some of this research, see Lazarus, Averill, & Opton, 1970, and Lazarus, Averill, & Opton, 1974).

All of this worked beautifully. We could, indeed, substantially lower or raise stress levels by changing the ways in which participants construed the events portrayed in the films. The research was widely reported in introductory psychology texts and other books, and, I believe, it convinced many conservative psychologists that the concept of appraisal, despite its subjective implications, was a reasonable way of explaining individual differences in emotional reactions.

In retrospect, I would like to think that this research helped move psychology away from radical behaviorism and toward a more cognitive outlook. Another interpretation is also quite possible, which is that the response to this research and its theoretical premise benefited from an outlook that was already changing. Either way, I was fortunate in my timing. Instead of being a deviant, I found myself in the 1970s working within the main body of psychological thought.

How I Got the Idea of Changing Stressful to Benign

There is one further story about this research that is worth telling. It is not widely known except among those who have read my autobiography (Lazarus, 1998c). It is about how I got the idea for the soundtrack and orienting passage studies that altered the research subjects' appraisal of film events and, therefore, their degree of stress while watching it.

In those early days, I was running individual subjects daily and watching the Arunta film with its six subincision operations. At first I regarded the film as extremely distressing, and my own reaction tendencies alternated between curiosity and the desire to turn away. Running subjects can be tedious, and, before long, I somehow began to think that the film was a great bore, and I wondered why anyone would be distressed while watching it. Unfortunately, I was not hooked up to psychophysiological instruments, but I was quite confident that the film had lost its potency to distress me. The standard explanation of the loss of stress potency as a result of repeated exposures is habituation. But what does habituation really mean? It certainly does not deal with the psychological process whereby what was once distressing ceases to be so merely by repetition. It is, in effect, no explanation at all but just a label given to an empirical finding. Discovering the process that had altered my response to the film seemed important.

Ultimately, I came to believe that, metaphorically speaking, a screen or fog of some sort had come between my mind and the emotional significance of the film events, preventing the emotional events from registering in my mind. Something like emotional distancing had taken place. I did not believe that the process was automatic or passive, as is implied by the word habituation. Rather, I came to believe that the loss of potency of the film to produce distress, which you will soon see was only temporary, was best understood as a product of an active psychological process akin to coping. I also became convinced that what I was dealing with was an even more fundamental process than ego defense. Specifically, it was a reappraisal of the significance of the filmed events, which may be the process by which defenses work. In this regard I was influenced also by Magda Arnold's (1960) book in which she used the term *appraisal* systematically as the mediating factor in emotion.

This research with soundtracks and orienting statements provided me with a sharpened and expanded sense of what was to become a

cognitive/motivational/relational theory of emotion based on my version of the concept of appraisal, which was somewhat different (more cognitive) than Arnold's (Lazarus, 1966, 1998b). One lesson I learned from this research was that running one's own research participants, or even being a subject in one's research, has value in providing a rich understanding of what is actually happening to research subjects.

There is another equally potent feature of this story that should be told because it reinforces my distancing explanation. When, later on, I sat watching the film in order to write appropriate denial and distancing soundtracks that were designed to change the subjects' appraisals of the film events, I suddenly discovered that I was once again reacting to the events as ugly and distressing. Isn't that strange? I had gotten used to the distressing aspects of the film, but this familiarity did not prevent an emotional reaction to the film.

I had been examining the film events and their emotional significance very closely in order to write the soundtracks. I believe this close scrutiny undermined my effort to distance myself from the films' events, and so the original emotional appraisal was fully restored. To write an effective prophylactic soundtrack, I had been forced once again psychologically to assimilate the significance of the distressing film events. Distancing works, but to sustain it, one has to keep the process alive. I believe this sustained distancing takes effort, although it can become easier after a time. Maintenance of emotional distancing would be a wonderfully interesting process to study, but research has not looked at it with the depth and breadth it deserves.

GRATITUDE

Giving and Receiving—Individual Differences, Interaction, Transaction, and Relational Meaning

As a prelude to examining the emotion of gratitude, I offer two special considerations. The first consideration is that the distinctive perspectives of personality and social psychology are never independent. Both are necessary to achieve an adequate understanding of the psychosocial dynamics of gift giving and receiving and their role in the diverse emotions that are generated by these exchanges. Donor and recipient represent very different social roles, yet they both constitute essential parts of a whole. Without one, the other could not exist.

The second consideration is that no matter how much we might wish to make broad generalizations about gift giving and receiving, there are always individual differences in goals, beliefs, coping, and appraisals, all of which contribute to inevitable variations in the emotion reaction. From a practical standpoint, to manage the relationship of gift giving and receiving effectively requires a capacity for empathy on the part of both the donor and recipient. The donor must take account of the recipient's sensitivities, and the recipient must infer the donor's intentions. Being an effective donor in a gift-giving relationship requires the ability to see below the surface of the recipient's outward behavior to his or her personal needs, outlooks, and vulnerabilities.

These considerations apply to giving and receiving material, social, or emotional support, which used to be referred to collectively as social support. Social support can also be thought of as gifts to friends, family, people in need, and others whose plight touches another person. If we intend to be supportive to someone in need, we must be sensitive to the needs and vulnerabilities of the person we wish to support. Good intentions are not enough.

Cultural values and the way the act of giving appears to the receiver are variables that operate within the context of gift giving and receiving. Notice that the fields that are represented in the above statement include cultural anthropology, sociology, social psychology, and personality psychology. Developmental psychology is also relevant if we ask how the people participating in the encounter got to be the way they are.

I want to underscore three basic concepts: *interaction*, *transaction*, and *relational meaning*. What takes place in an emotion is always an interaction between an individual with a distinctive personality and a particular social situation. I have in the past emphasized the term *transaction* rather than *interaction* because it more clearly refers to the encounter flow, or give and take, among the parties. However, neither the term *interaction* nor the term *transaction* encompasses the sense of relational meaning, which each individual constructs from this flow.

The enactment of a social role and the emotions that are aroused in that role are based on the relational meaning of that role for each of the persons in the encounter, as well as on the formal rules of social engagement. The separate behaviors and causal variables involved in these roles are only subordinate parts of the scenario of gift

giving and receiving as an observer might view and try to understand it. I began to see the distinction between interaction and transaction in the 1960s, but I did not appreciate the full implications of relational meaning. I began to articulate these implications in Lazarus and Launier (1978), Lazarus (1981), and in Lazarus and Folkman (1984, 1987), where the appraisal process was more fully detailed. Pervin and Lewis's book on interactional psychology, in which the Lazarus and Launier chapter appeared, distinguished among descriptive interaction, statistical interaction, and reciprocal action-transaction. With these distinctions in mind, let us turn now to a brief case history of gratitude, after which I will make an analysis of the psychological processes that underlie it.

A Real Life Experience of Gratitude

In 1940, when Richard was 18 years old, he was a student at the City College of New York (CCNY), which offered a first-rate free education for impoverished students during the Depression that followed the stock market crash of 1929. To manage expenses such as meals, books, and fees, Richard needed paid employment, which in those years was scarce.

Having learned to cut children's hair reasonably well at summer camps where he had been a counselor, Richard earned some money as a barber for the students at the college. He posted ads in various locations at the college indicating the hours between his classes in which he was free to cut hair. In order to give haircuts, he used what had once been a large two-mirrored bathroom on campus. He arranged the times for haircuts by appointment only and charged 20 cents, 5 cents below a nearby barbershop. He also personally advertised his services in front of his college classes before lectures.

Most of them being impoverished, students at CCNY were sympathetic to the young entrepreneur and welcomed saving even 5 cents. Before long he had a thriving business. One day, unexpectedly, he was visited by a policeman and told that he must stop the haircuts because he did not have a license. The local barber had learned of the competition from one of the students and had complained to the authorities. The license was too expensive for Richard to afford, so his business was suddenly closed down.

As luck would have it, a statistics professor, who had heard Richard advertise his barber business at the start of one of the profes-

sor's class sessions, asked him how things were going. When he revealed the sad story, the professor asked him if he wanted a job working for him at 50 cents an hour delivering reports in downtown Manhattan. These reports, based on survey research methods, dealt with the estimated sizes of the national radio audience for the top 50 popular songs being played on the radio in New York City. This survey data later became the basis for a popular radio and television program called *Your Hit Parade*, which presented the 10 most popular songs each week.

The job offer was a lifesaver, and Richard was delighted to accept. He went to work for the professor, collating and delivering reports between 5 a.m. and 10 a.m., five days a week, after which he would rush to his first class. Months later, he was offered a better job doing calculations for the research report itself at the same rate of pay for 40 hours a week. He found ways of being more efficient at doing these calculations and soon was doing the job in half the time. This, of course, endangered his 40-hour-a-week take-home pay, which would be cut in half if the professor learned that he only needed 20 hours to complete the survey.

Richard was greatly troubled by his moral dilemma. He felt guilty about cheating the professor and decided he should tell him about it, hoping for some reasonable solution. When the professor heard about Richard's dilemma, he said he was very pleased with Richard's innovative procedures and appreciated his honesty. He said he was only interested in seeing that the job was done well, and he was willing to pay him a flat fee—equal to the 40-hour week—for producing the weekly report, regardless of how long it now took. This kind and thoughtful act preserved Richard's income and gave him much more time to study. He was enormously grateful for the professor's generous gift, which changed the terms of his employment so greatly in his favor. He never forgot the kindness.

Fifty years later, when he learned that the college professor who had helped him was celebrating his 80th birthday, Richard sent his mentor a warm letter about the professor's generous patronage and what it had meant to him, once again expressing his gratitude. The letter he received in return was equally warm and filled with reminiscences of those earlier days. It was one of those wonderfully positive experiences early in life that encourages comparable acts when the recipient of the generosity is at last able to do something for others facing similar struggles.

Analysis of the Experience of Gratitude

The relational meaning of gratitude is *appreciation of an altruistic gift that provides benefit*. In a gratitude scenario, the provoking action is giving a gift, which may be received and reacted to with gratitude, received with a different emotion, or simply rejected with or without an emotion. I am aware that others view gratitude as a quid pro quo, a form of institutionalized social exchange of gifts. Whatever generates gratitude depends on the behavior of the donor and the appraisal made by the recipient. In my view, however, if the recipient of the gift views the act of the donor as an effort at personal gain or a quid pro quo, gratitude is not likely to be experienced, though it may be simulated to ingratiate a powerful donor.

Regardless of how it is viewed theoretically, gratitude is always a product of a two-person relationship consisting of a donor and a recipient. The other person may be present only in our imagination, as when we feel grateful to deceased parents or friends when something reminds us of them. The source of gratitude may not even be persons, as when, for example, we feel grateful to a social institution, good fortune, fate, our genetic inheritance, or a mystical force or being such as God. These sources usually inspire the word *thankful* instead of *grateful*.

A gift may lead to gratitude, but it can also result in other emotions, such as joy, anger (resentment), contempt, anxiety, embarrassment, shame, or guilt, depending on what the gift giving and receiving means to the recipient. The persons engaged in the transaction often experience a more complex psychological encounter or series of encounters than may be evident on the surface.

If we are to understand the process whereby gratitude, or any other emotion, is aroused and coped with, we must examine the participants' views of the history of the relationship, the flow of actions and reactions, the appraisal and coping processes and the factors that influence them, and the outcomes of these processes at both conscious and unconscious levels. The case example of gratitude began with a student's need for work and a professor who needed a worker. Providing Richard with a job did not necessitate gratitude because the hiring decision could readily be viewed as a quid pro quo. What most provoked Richard's gratitude in this situation was the professor's interest in his well-being and, especially, his unhesitating readiness to grant him the same pay for less time worked.

Other appraisals are, of course, possible. Perhaps the professor was merely being wise enough to see that he would get more from the student by his generosity. Perhaps the money was not important to the professor because it came from a major music publishing consortium, which hired him to do the survey research. We cannot know precisely what was in the professor's mind, but it was essential for the emotional outcome of gratitude to occur that Richard, the recipient, appraised his action as altruistic—that is, beyond the call of duty. Many years later, when Richard became a professor, he tried to behave to students who were needy in the same fashion as had the professor who had helped him. The gratitude experience had created an altruistic goal for Richard, however remote in time it was from the original.

Other Scenarios of Gift Giving and Receiving

It might be useful to think of other gift-giving scenarios in which the appraisals and their relational meanings do not result in gratitude for the recipient but provoke other emotions instead. To make this kind of analysis, the two social roles, donor and recipient, should be separated. In addition, we must consider the behavior of the donor in giving the gift, the personality of the donor, the personality of the recipient, and the history of their relationship. I have created several imaginary gift-centered scenarios that have personality-based causal variations in the reactions of recipients of the gift. In effect, I speak of a few other Richards who differ in personality from the one who was originally described as reacting with gratitude.

Recipients

Let us imagine a different Richard, one who has a history of feeling victimized by society and harbors a deep resentment about being downtrodden by those in authority. Given such an outlook, it is not difficult to suppose that this Richard feels entitled to the extra pay for the same amount of work and does not feel grateful at all. He might even feign gratitude in order to stay on the good side of the professor, who, after all, wields considerable power over him. He could also feel some contempt—a form of anger—toward this tender-hearted old fellow.

Still another Richard might feel ashamed about being needy. Being needy signifies to him that he has failed to live up to a demanding ego ideal of always being independent, which would be difficult to achieve during the Great Depression. He copes with his shame by externalizing the blame for his neediness, which leads him to resent deeply having to accept the gift, although he cannot afford to refuse it. It is not only the act that serves as the provocation to shame but the conviction that this act represents a character defect that all can see.

Another Richard might deal with shame and anger by hiding what has happened from others or by avoiding contact with the donor, who will always be a reminder of Richard's disgrace. Because of the discrepancy in power, he cannot afford to express his anger openly. Resenting low power might be a chronic disposition of this Richard toward anyone who has power over him.

Embarrassment, anxiety, and guilt are some of the other emotions that might be connected with being a recipient of a gift. Embarrassment is more trivial than shame and more easily managed. Anxiety could be based on the resentment that coping with shame has caused because, if it is leaked to a powerful donor, it presents the danger of retaliation. Guilt may arise from the unrelenting conviction that taking what you haven't earned is morally wrong. Guilt can also arise in this context from the failure to feel grateful for what has been received. To cope with guilt, this Richard might refuse the gift or do penance by giving something back to the donor that he could easily afford.

Personality-based assessments like these can be tricky because we might not know how rigid or flexible each of these trait dispositions might be. Flexibility implies that despite a disposition to experience shame and resentment, this kind of appraisal would be subject to situational variations that might activate or suppress the trait. If the trait is rigid and the person is dominated by shame, the expected interaction of personality and social conditions might be weak or nonexistent. Then, the feeling of shame would not be mitigated even under benign social conditions.

Donors

Diverse emotional patterns should also be found in the context of gift giving and receiving when we examine the donor's actions and

the personality factors that might lie behind those actions. A narcissistic donor might make a gift distressing for a recipient by behaving arrogantly or in a self-serving manner. A competitive donor may want to lord it over others to enhance his own ego. In addition, donors who have been abused may, in turn, manifest abusiveness toward recipients of their largess. Some people also enjoy being cruel, and in giving a gift, they might turn the social relationship into a subtle or obvious assault on the recipient.

Is Gratitude an Emotion?

Not long ago I presented some of these ideas about gratitude at a Berkeley colloquy consisting of faculty and graduate students from different disciplines. A few of those present expressed doubts that gratitude should be considered an emotion. My answer was that emotions are always embodied—that is, they reflect bodily changes associated with either increased or decreased arousal. I do not think there have been direct measurements of arousal in the case of gratitude, but if the feeling is reasonably strong, the behavioral signs of arousal should become evident. I believe gratitude should be considered as an emotion as long as it involves some degree of bodily change in a significant proportion of instances, even if the change is modest.

A major complication in making the judgment that gratitude is an emotion is that an unknown proportion of claims about feeling grateful are merely pro forma reflections of social expectations or are based on pure deception. Detection of this deception is bound to be difficult just as is apt to be true of lying in general. Yet the very effort to demonstrate that one is grateful, or to engage in a successful deception about this, is likely to produce its own physiological arousal, which complicates the task of obtaining evidence to support the claim that any instance of gratitude is an emotion.

DANGERS OF FIELD SPECIALIZATION

When I began graduate study of psychology after World War II, most students thought of themselves as general psychologists-to-be, although we also tended to have preferences for specific subdisciplines. My preference was clinical psychology, although I did not see it as greatly removed from personality or social psychology, as it

seems to be today. For many years I did mostly laboratory experiments because, in those days, this was the way to do science. Clinicians viewed me as an experimental psychologist, and experimental psychologists viewed me as a clinician.

For some time, I have seen what I consider to be an excessive degree of specialization in our field—indeed in most fields, including medicine (in which I seem to have a separate physician for nearly every organ of my body). I consider this overspecialization dangerous if one wants to do the best and most creative research on almost all psychological phenomena. These phenomena are always much broader than the boundaries of our specialties, not only in psychology but also with respect to cognate fields such as sociology, cultural anthropology, physiology, and medicine.

A high degree of field specialization can greatly interfere with a full understanding of a broad subject matter. We all know that personality psychologists mostly read the sections of journals devoted to personality research and that social psychologists read mostly about social psychological research, even when these topics are housed within the same journal. This ultimately leads to a narrowing of the perspective with which any issue of psychology is viewed. If we limit ourselves to either personality psychology or to social psychology, we are bound to be dealing with only a small part of the whole topic of coping. This is the main reason I have tried to embed giving and receiving and its emotions within both personality and social psychology. There is a strong need for all of us to reach out aggressively to broaden the scope of our understanding.

A POSSIBLE MANDATE FOR THE FUTURE

I believe it is time for personality psychologists—who are the main readers of the *Journal of Personality*—to decrease their emphasis on this or that group of people who are characterized by some shared trait or style. If groups *are* studied, an effort should also be made to describe individual variations and the contexts in which these variations occur. Overlap among groups is so great and individual differences so ubiquitous that seeking to explore these differences seems to me to be almost futile and certainly impractical.

If we want to compare groups, then we might select certain groups on the practical basis of common life problems (see Somerfield &

McCrae and commentators, 2000). For example, we might choose those who are victimized, those who victimize others, those plagued by a life-threatening or handicapping disease, children in such situations, the elderly, the families of those who are suffering, and so forth. The approach should be a combination of intra-individual and interindividual, so consistency and change can both be identified. Description should be as important as a search for causes, though we always want to understand why psychological phenomena are occurring.

Personality research should move beyond cross-sectional designs, and efforts should be made to produce a rich, full, contextual portrait of our research participants. I assert that we need to go back to a much more idiographic perspective and seek rich in-depth descriptions of the lives of individuals over time and diverse conditions. For this, longitudinal research designs, or what I have referred to as the ipsative-normative research style, is essential. The focus of such designs is a combination of intra- and interindividual comparison.

I should point out as I did elsewhere (e.g., Lazarus, 1998a) that other psychologists have influenced me in pushing for an ipsative-normative research style. One is Donald Broverman, whose (1962) treatment of normative and ipsative measurement is enlightening. The other is Seymour Epstein (1983), with whom I have had a long relationship characterized by mutual respect. What makes Epstein's work important in the context of my emphasis on ipsative-normative research designs is that he showed clearly how an interindividual correlation with respect to emotions can differ in degree and direction from an intra-individual correlation. In effect, what goes together in emotions—say, anger and fear—is not the same if we look at people from these two perspectives. When we compare people interindividually, anger and fear are positively correlated; if an individual tends to be angry, she or he is also likely to be fearful. The correlation is positive. However, if the same people are compared with themselves—that is, intra-individually—the individual who is angry is unlikely to be fearful at the same time, and vice versa. The correlation is negative. In my own topical interest areas, the work of Tennen, Affleck, Armeli, and Carney (2002); Affleck, Tennen, Urrows, and Higgins (1994); Affleck, Urrows, Tennen, and Higgins (1992); Mohr, Armeli, Tennen, Carney, Affleck, and Hromi (2001); and Zautra, Smith, Affleck, and Tennen (2001) is, in my opinion,

attuned to description and captures well the virtues of ipsative-normative research designs.

I hope personality psychologists will take what I have said to heart. Our emphasis should be person-centered as much or more than variable-centered. I also hope that the study of emotions in their relational context and the application of ipsative-normative study designs will foster the growth of a person-centered personality psychology.

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